Palestinians as "Subhuman": The Language of Israeli Leaders Vaturi, Gillerman, Gallant, Ben-Dahan, Dayan, Begin, Smotrich, Liberman, Ya'alon, and Katsav

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This paper explores a dangerous and consistent pattern in the rhetoric used by high-ranking Israeli officials and military leaders across multiple generations. From Moshe Dayan to Bezalel Smotrich, Israeli leaders have described Palestinians and members of Hamas using deeply dehumanizing terms—such as "subhuman," "human animals," "beasts," "cancer," and even beings from "another galaxy." While often dismissed as political hyperbole, such language plays a central role in the normalization of state violence, the justification of war crimes, and the erosion of any prospect for peaceful resolution. Through close analysis of public statements by ten figures—spanning the military, diplomatic, and political establishment—this paper documents how language has been weaponized to erase Palestinian personhood and frame their existence as a threat to be removed rather than a people to be understood. The implications are profound, both morally and legally. When those in power repeatedly use language that strips a population of humanity, it lays the groundwork for systemic abuses. Words matter—and in the Israeli-Palestinian context, they may foretell policy, shape perception, and determine lives.

Keywords: Israel, Palestine, dehumanization, rhetoric, subhuman, genocide, incitement, apartheid, occupation, war crimes, Gaza, Likud, military ethics, human rights, international law, Middle East conflict, political language, hate speech, state violence, ethnic cleansing. A collaboration with GPT-4o. CC4.0.

1. Introduction

Dehumanization has long been recognized as a precursor to mass violence, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. When political or military leaders describe an opposing population as less than human, the psychological and moral barriers to committing atrocities can rapidly dissolve. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where national identity, territorial claims, and religious convictions are deeply entangled, the rhetoric used by leaders carries immense weight. Words are not merely expressive—they shape policy, justify action, and influence public perception both domestically and globally.

This paper examines a disturbing pattern in the language used by ten Israeli leaders and high-ranking officials across various administrations, ranging from the early decades of Israel's founding to the present day. In their public statements, these leaders have described Palestinians—both civilians and members of Hamas—using language typically reserved for animals, diseases, or extraterrestrial beings. Phrases such as "subhuman," "human animals," "two-footed beasts," and "cancer" are not only morally reprehensible but also raise serious legal and ethical concerns under the frameworks of international humanitarian law and the Genocide Convention.

By analyzing the context, position, and specific rhetoric of each individual—Nissim Vaturi, Dan Gillerman, Yoav Gallant, Eli Ben-Dahan, Moshe Dayan, Menachem Begin, Bezalel Smotrich, Avigdor Liberman, Moshe Ya'alon, and Moshe Katsav—this paper seeks to document and understand how dehumanizing language has been used to describe Palestinians. In doing so, we highlight the potential consequences such rhetoric holds for peace, justice, and the future of both peoples.

Each of the following sections focuses on one leader, providing background on their role, the specific statements made, and the broader implications of their language. The concluding section draws connections between these cases and the dangerous normalization of dehumanization in geopolitical discourse.

2. Nissim Vaturi

Position: Deputy Speaker of the Israeli Knesset; Member of the Likud Party

Nissim Vaturi, a senior member of the Israeli Knesset and Deputy Speaker representing the right-wing Likud party, has been outspoken in his advocacy for aggressive military action against Palestinians in Gaza. His statements have attracted international condemnation for what many perceive as overt dehumanization and incitement.

In a widely circulated statement, Vaturi referred to Palestinians in Gaza as "subhuman," asserting that all Palestinian men should be killed and that "no one in the world wants them." This remark was not made in the heat of battle or in offhand conversation—it was a deliberate public expression of contempt for an entire demographic group, presented with an almost genocidal overtone.

Vaturi's rhetoric fits within a broader ideological framework within elements of the Likud party, where maximalist territorial claims over Gaza and the West Bank are justified by framing Palestinians as not only an enemy but a lesser form of life. Dehumanization in this context serves to desensitize the public and to lower the threshold for policies of mass displacement, collective punishment, and potentially ethnic cleansing.

Under international law, particularly the Genocide Convention and various human rights treaties, incitement to genocide and public advocacy of hatred constitute serious violations. Vaturi's language is not only morally inflammatory but arguably meets the threshold for investigation under these legal standards.

Moreover, his comments contribute to the hardening of public attitudes within Israel, making reconciliation and coexistence increasingly difficult. When elected leaders speak in such terms, it signals to the public that extreme views are acceptable and may even be state policy. This undermines any efforts toward peace, fuels radicalization on both sides, and legitimizes brutality under the guise of national security.

Nissim Vaturi's statements represent not just an individual outburst, but a window into a systemic problem: the use of dehumanizing language by those in power to maintain and justify a state of perpetual conflict.

3. Dan Gillerman

Position: Former Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations

Dan Gillerman served as Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations from 2003 to 2008, a period marked by significant regional turmoil, including the Second Intifada's aftermath and the 2006 Lebanon War. Known for his articulate diplomacy and firm defense of Israeli policies on the world stage, Gillerman also attracted controversy for his rhetorical choices—particularly when speaking about Palestinians and their leadership.

In a televised interview amid heightened tensions and violence in Gaza, Gillerman referred to Palestinians as "horrible, inhuman animals." He expressed disbelief at the global concern for their wellbeing, implying that their suffering was neither surprising nor undeserving. The comment, made in English and directed toward an international audience, quickly spread across social and traditional media, provoking sharp criticism from human rights organizations and foreign observers.

Unlike battlefield remarks made in emotional duress, Gillerman's words were deliberate, polished, and made in a diplomatic context—heightening their gravity. As a former ambassador, he was trained in the language of international law, negotiation, and public relations. That makes his dehumanizing language especially significant: it wasn't the product of inexperience or carelessness but rather a calculated dismissal of the Palestinian population's humanity.

This type of language undermines the very institutions Gillerman once represented. The United Nations exists to promote peace, human rights, and international cooperation. When one of its former envoys refers to a civilian population in zoological terms, it erodes the credibility of diplomatic dialogue and suggests that violence is not just permissible, but natural or inevitable.

Gillerman's comment also contributes to a broader narrative wherein Palestinians are not seen as a people with political grievances, history, or rights—but rather as an obstacle to be contained or eradicated. Such framing is not only dangerous, but potentially contributes to a permissive environment for war crimes and policies of disproportionate force.

His remarks serve as a case study in how dehumanizing rhetoric does not merely come from the political or military fringe but is sometimes embedded in the speech of elite diplomats. It is this normalization of hate in high-level discourse that may be most insidious—and most difficult to uproot.

4. Yoav Gallant

Position: Israeli Defense Minister (2023–)

Yoav Gallant, a senior figure in the Israeli government and a member of the Likud party, has held numerous military and defense roles throughout his career. As Defense Minister during the 2023–2024 war in Gaza, Gallant oversaw the initial stages of a large-scale offensive following Hamas's October 7th attacks. His language during this period became a focal point of international attention and legal scrutiny.

On October 9, 2023, just two days after the Hamas attack, Gallant announced a "complete siege" of the Gaza Strip, cutting off electricity, food, and fuel. In the same breath, he declared: "We are fighting human animals, and we are acting accordingly." This statement was issued during a press conference where policy decisions of severe humanitarian consequence were being unveiled, including the total blockade of a population of over two million people, half of whom are children.

The phrase "human animals" is a textbook example of dehumanizing language. It fuses anthropological ambiguity with zoological insult—implying that Palestinians may look human but do not truly belong to the human moral community. Such terminology, especially when coming from a top-ranking defense official during

wartime, is not only inflammatory but can serve as a rhetorical license for excessive and indiscriminate violence.

This statement became central to legal filings in international courts. South Africa cited it as part of its 2024 genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, asserting that Gallant's words indicated genocidal intent. While intent is difficult to prove in such cases, public language by state leaders is among the primary forms of admissible evidence.

Gallant's remarks also reflect a deep militarization of language within the Israeli security establishment. By framing the enemy not merely as combatants but as subhuman, military operations are psychologically decoupled from moral constraints. Civilian casualties, collective punishment, and the destruction of basic infrastructure are implicitly justified.

In sum, Gallant's invocation of "human animals" during the launch of a total blockade was not a rhetorical misstep—it was a signal. It broadcasted the moral framework under which the campaign would proceed, one in which conventional rules of war were secondary to a narrative of existential conflict against a population rendered inhuman. His words mark a chilling moment in the normalization of dehumanization at the highest levels of state policy.

5. Eli Ben-Dahan

Position: Former Deputy Defense Minister; Member of the Jewish Home Party

Eli Ben-Dahan, an Orthodox rabbi and politician, served as Deputy Defense Minister under the Netanyahu administration. Affiliated with the right-wing religious nationalist Jewish Home party, his public statements have often reflected a theocratic and exclusionary vision of Israeli identity. His views on Palestinians have been especially controversial, not only for their content but for the religious legitimacy he invokes in their defense.

In a 2013 radio interview, Ben-Dahan notoriously declared, "Palestinians are beasts, they are not human." Later, he attempted to walk back the statement

slightly, claiming he was referring only to "terrorists"—but the broader context of his remarks suggested otherwise. He also claimed, in a separate interview, that even among “goyim” (non-Jews), Palestinians were “lower” and “worse.” Such statements go beyond political critique or even wartime rhetoric—they invoke a divine hierarchy that places Jewish souls categorically above others.

Ben-Dahan’s comments illustrate the fusion of religious dogma with ultranationalist politics in the most extreme form. Unlike Gallant’s or Gillerman’s rhetoric, which was framed within secular military or diplomatic language, Ben-Dahan's dehumanization is theological. This carries a unique danger: when hate is divinely sanctioned, it becomes resistant to ethical critique and immune to diplomatic negotiation.

Such language has been condemned not only by international observers but also by segments of Israeli civil society. Nevertheless, Ben-Dahan’s views were not fringe. At the time of his remarks, he was overseeing aspects of the Israeli Defense Ministry's relationship with the West Bank, including policy toward Palestinian residents and coordination with settlers—giving his words significant operational relevance.

In moral and legal terms, Ben-Dahan’s comments align closely with incitement. The Genocide Convention prohibits “direct and public incitement to commit genocide,” and while not every expression of dehumanization meets this bar, repeated assertions of inherent inferiority certainly contribute to an enabling environment for war crimes or ethnic cleansing.

In a landscape where many Israeli officials use militaristic or strategic frames to justify their actions, Ben-Dahan represents a more explicitly theological brand of dehumanization. His view of Palestinians as ontologically inferior—less human by divine design—may be among the most dangerous justifications for exclusionary violence. It denies not only legal and civil rights, but also spiritual equality.

6. Moshe Dayan

Position: Former Israeli Defense Minister; Chief of Staff of the IDF

Moshe Dayan remains one of the most iconic figures in Israeli history—a war hero, military strategist, and political leader whose career shaped the foundational decades of the Israeli state. As Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces during the 1956 Suez Crisis and later as Defense Minister during the pivotal 1967 Six-Day War, Dayan's legacy is often celebrated within Israeli nationalist discourse. Yet alongside his military achievements is a record of statements that have drawn serious ethical concerns—particularly regarding his treatment of the Palestinian population under occupation.

One of Dayan's most disturbing alleged remarks came in the aftermath of the 1967 war, when Israel captured the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Reflecting on the fate of the Palestinian people living under Israeli rule, Dayan is reported to have said: *"We should tell them [the Palestinians] that we have no solution, that you shall continue to live like dogs, and whoever wishes may leave."* This statement, documented in various academic and journalistic sources, encapsulates a brutally pragmatic and unapologetic vision of permanent occupation.

While Dayan did not use explicitly zoological language to call Palestinians "dogs," the metaphor—suggesting a subhuman, degraded state of being imposed indefinitely—is unmistakably dehumanizing. To "live like dogs" is not merely a condition of poverty or hardship; it implies a forfeiture of dignity, self-determination, and basic humanity.

The political implications of such rhetoric are profound. Rather than presenting a temporary or regrettable occupation, Dayan framed it as a stable and acceptable order. There would be no political solution, no statehood, no citizenship—just an indefinite existence under domination, with emigration as the only alternative. This vision, articulated at the highest levels of power, arguably laid the foundation for decades of policy that normalized permanent control over a disenfranchised people.

Dayan's comments have been cited in numerous scholarly works exploring the origins of Israel's occupation policies and their moral underpinnings. While some defenders argue that Dayan was being candid about the lack of a viable solution, the ethical question remains: is it acceptable for a democratic state to condemn millions to a life "like dogs" because their freedom is politically inconvenient?

Moreover, such language contributes to the erosion of empathy within the occupying population. When the people under your control are not described as fellow human beings striving for dignity, but as a problem to be contained, there is little room for compassion—and even less for justice.

Dayan's legacy is thus inseparable from both his battlefield leadership and his rhetorical framing of Palestinians as an enduring, dehumanized burden. It is a legacy that continues to influence political thinking in Israel to this day.

7. Menachem Begin

Position: Former Prime Minister of Israel (1977–1983); Founder of the Likud Party

Menachem Begin was a towering figure in Israeli political life—a former leader of the Irgun paramilitary group, founder of the Likud party, and the Prime Minister who signed the historic peace agreement with Egypt in 1979. Despite his peacemaking legacy abroad, Begin's domestic rhetoric and policies regarding Palestinians, especially during military conflicts, painted a starkly different picture.

One of the most chilling statements attributed to Begin was made in 1982 during the Lebanon War. Referring to Palestinians, Begin stated in the Knesset: *"The Palestinians are beasts walking on two legs."* Though some defenders have claimed that he was referring specifically to terrorists or militants, the generalizing nature of the phrase and its delivery in Israel's legislative chamber gave it the appearance of an official denunciation of an entire population.

This statement is one of the clearest examples of dehumanizing rhetoric in modern political discourse. By stripping Palestinians of their humanity and likening them to beasts—creatures driven by base instincts and unworthy of moral

consideration—Begin cast them not as adversaries in a political struggle but as existential threats to be eradicated. In doing so, he elevated Israel's military campaigns beyond national defense to what could be seen as civilizational purification.

The 1982 Lebanon War, in which this remark was made, was itself marked by immense controversy. It culminated in the Sabra and Shatila massacre, carried out by Phalangist militias with Israeli complicity. The rhetorical environment surrounding the war—including Begin's statements—has been examined by historians and human rights organizations as creating the moral conditions under which such atrocities became possible.

Begin's framing of Palestinians as "two-legged beasts" also underscores the function of metaphor in wartime politics. These are not merely slurs; they are ideological tools. Such language simplifies complex historical and political grievances into bestiality, allowing for the suppression of empathy and the justification of disproportionate violence.

Begin's rhetoric stands in sharp contrast to his international image as a peacemaker. It reveals a duality often present in statecraft—where diplomacy abroad coexists with aggression at home. It also illustrates how foundational leaders of Israel's major political parties helped shape a discourse that has persisted across generations, normalizing the marginalization and dehumanization of Palestinians within both policy and public opinion.

In examining Begin's words, we do not judge only a moment in time but track the legacy of exclusion and moral exceptionalism that continues to influence the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

8. Bezalel Smotrich

Position: Israeli Finance Minister; Leader of the Religious Zionist Party

Bezalel Smotrich is one of the most outspoken and ideologically rigid figures in contemporary Israeli politics. As Finance Minister and head of the far-right

Religious Zionist Party, Smotrich has been instrumental in promoting policies that favor Jewish settlement expansion, annexation of the West Bank, and the subjugation of Palestinians under what he views as a biblically sanctioned Jewish state. His rhetoric has frequently crossed the line from nationalist fervor into explicit dehumanization and ethnic incitement.

Smotrich's statements regarding Gaza have been particularly severe. In 2025, during the escalation of Israel's offensive operations, he publicly declared that Gaza "will be entirely destroyed" and that its population would be displaced "in large numbers to third countries." This was not merely a personal view; Smotrich claimed the plan was supported by Israel's security cabinet under the codename *Operation Gideon's Chariots*. His proposal effectively endorsed forced population transfer—an act widely considered a violation of international law.

Smotrich has a history of inflammatory remarks. He has previously described himself as a "proud homophobe," called for segregation of Jewish and Arab women in maternity wards, and stated that Israel should govern according to halakha (Jewish religious law). His proposal for a "decisive plan" includes the threat of execution or expulsion for Palestinians who refuse to accept Jewish sovereignty over the land from the river to the sea. Such ideology rests on an inherently dehumanizing premise: that Palestinians have no legitimate claim to personhood within the Zionist narrative unless they submit entirely.

While Smotrich often frames his proposals in terms of national security or religious destiny, the language used—complete destruction, permanent displacement, submission or removal—echoes the worst examples of ethnonationalist thinking in modern history. His statements have drawn sharp rebukes from international human rights organizations, and legal experts have argued that his rhetoric may meet the threshold for incitement to ethnic cleansing or even genocide.

Perhaps most concerning is that Smotrich is not an isolated figure on the fringes of Israeli politics. He holds a senior cabinet position and has been involved in high-level decision-making affecting not only economic policy but also the fate of Palestinians in the occupied territories. His political ascent reflects a shift in Israeli

public discourse toward the normalization of extremist views, where openly dehumanizing language becomes part of statecraft rather than a deviation from it.

Smotrich's rhetoric, backed by institutional power, demonstrates how ideology, when fused with executive authority, can turn words into policy—and policy into potential atrocity.

9. Avigdor Liberman

Position: Former Defense Minister and Foreign Minister; Leader of Yisrael Beiteinu

Avigdor Liberman, a Soviet-born Israeli politician and founder of the secular nationalist party Yisrael Beiteinu, has long been known for his hardline positions on Arab citizens of Israel and the Palestinian population. A powerful figure in multiple Israeli coalitions, Liberman has served in several high-profile roles, including as Defense Minister and Foreign Minister. His rhetoric has frequently stirred international controversy, often blurring the line between aggressive nationalism and incitement.

In reference to Hamas militants and their use of civilian infrastructure in Gaza, Liberman described them as "cannibals" who "use their children as weapons." While on the surface such language might be interpreted as metaphorical condemnation of alleged human shield tactics, the dehumanizing implications are unmistakable. Cannibalism is one of the most ancient and visceral forms of moral inversion—a trait associated not just with enemies, but with monsters.

Liberman's choice of words strips away any remaining moral or legal nuance from the conflict. By characterizing Palestinian fighters—and by implication, the people they claim to represent—as subhuman predators who devour their own kind, he creates a binary moral universe in which the only response to such evil is total eradication. This aligns with other policy proposals he has put forward, such as the "loyalty oath" for Arab citizens and suggestions that disloyal Arab citizens should be expelled from Israel altogether.

Perhaps most notoriously, in 2015, Liberman suggested beheading disloyal Arab citizens of Israel, stating, *"Those who are against us, there's nothing to be done—we must take an axe and cut off their heads."* Though framed as hyperbole by some of his defenders, the comment was taken seriously enough to elicit widespread condemnation both within Israel and internationally.

Liberman's role in Israeli politics is not merely symbolic. He has overseen military strategy, influenced foreign relations, and shaped the security discourse of the state. His language is reflective of a broader worldview that sees coexistence with Palestinians not as a challenge to be managed but as a threat to be eliminated.

In terms of international legal standards, Liberman's repeated use of bestial and savage metaphors, especially when coupled with his calls for harsh punitive actions, may constitute incitement. The normalization of this kind of rhetoric from high-ranking officials adds to the growing concern that systemic dehumanization has become institutionalized in Israeli political life.

Liberman's framing of Palestinians as cannibalistic or barbaric is not just offensive—it is strategically dangerous. It feeds into cycles of hatred and violence that ultimately undermine security for both peoples, foreclosing any path to mutual recognition or lasting peace.

10. Moshe Ya'alon

Position: Former Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces; Former Defense Minister

Moshe Ya'alon is a prominent military and political figure in Israeli history, having served as both Chief of Staff of the IDF and later as Defense Minister. Known for his strategic acumen and hawkish stance on security issues, Ya'alon has played a major role in shaping Israeli military doctrine in the 21st century. However, alongside his service record lies a body of rhetoric that has contributed to the dehumanization of Palestinians, particularly through metaphors rooted in medicine and pathology.

One of Ya’alon’s most infamous comments came when he described the threat of Palestinian resistance as a “cancerous manifestation” within Israeli society. He elaborated that this “cancer” needed to be treated by “chemotherapy,” but warned that “surgical removal” might ultimately be necessary. Though cloaked in clinical metaphor, the implications of this language are disturbing: Palestinians are depicted not as political adversaries, but as a malignant disease growing within the Israeli body politic—something to be excised, destroyed, or irradiated rather than engaged with.

Such imagery is not accidental. The use of disease metaphors in political rhetoric has a long and dark history, particularly in contexts of ethnic conflict and genocide. Nazi propaganda described Jews as a "plague" or "infection" threatening German purity; Hutu extremists in Rwanda described Tutsis as "cockroaches" and "infections" prior to the 1994 genocide. In each case, reducing a people to a biological threat enabled and justified extraordinary violence.

By casting Palestinians in this role, Ya'alon shifted the discourse from one of conflict to one of contamination. There is no negotiating with a tumor. It must be removed—preferably early, and if not, then aggressively. This framing leaves no room for diplomacy, rights, or coexistence. It turns political decisions into medical emergencies and justifies collective punishment as a form of national "healing."

It is also important to note the structural power behind such language. As Chief of Staff and then Defense Minister, Ya'alon’s words carried operational consequences. His worldview helped shape military policy during pivotal moments, including the Second Intifada and various operations in Gaza and the West Bank. His metaphors were not idle rhetoric; they reflected—and arguably guided—the systemic logic of containment, control, and destruction.

Ya'alon later distanced himself from the more extreme implications of his statements, claiming that his comments referred specifically to terrorism, not the Palestinian people as a whole. Yet the lack of clear distinction in his metaphor—and the absence of consistent effort to humanize Palestinians elsewhere in his public discourse—weakens that defense.

In the end, Moshe Ya'alon's clinical dehumanization may be one of the most insidious forms of all. It presents violence as rational, precise, and morally necessary, disguising cruelty in the language of care. Such rhetoric poses a particular danger because it sanitizes the horror it enables.

11. Moshe Katsav

Position: Former President of Israel (2000–2007)

Moshe Katsav, who served as Israel's eighth president, held what is traditionally considered a ceremonial and unifying role within the state. As head of state from 2000 to 2007, Katsav's responsibilities included representing Israel internationally and embodying the moral and constitutional authority of the nation. However, even from this high office, he made statements that contributed to the dehumanization of Palestinians in striking and surreal ways.

During a 2001 visit with a group of schoolchildren, Katsav reportedly told them that Palestinians "don't belong to our continent, to our world, but actually belong to a different galaxy." The comment, while couched in fantastical language, is deeply dehumanizing. By placing Palestinians beyond not only the nation or religion, but outside of the very world or species, Katsav implied an irreconcilable otherness that excludes them from the moral community altogether.

This "extraterrestrial" framing—though unusual—functions similarly to more overt animalistic or pathological dehumanization. By asserting that Palestinians are so radically different as to inhabit another galaxy, Katsav denied them not only nationhood but even basic ontological familiarity. The statement leaves no possibility for shared identity, empathy, or political compromise. It suggests not conflict between peoples, but the presence of an alien threat.

Coming from the office of the presidency, such rhetoric carries a symbolic weight far beyond the words themselves. The president is expected to uphold democratic norms, represent all Israeli citizens (including Arab Israelis), and elevate public discourse. When such a figure engages in othering on a cosmic scale, it marks a

failure of moral leadership and helps reinforce the normalization of exclusion and contempt within broader society.

Katsav's comment, while perhaps seen by some as a metaphorical flourish or exaggeration, has been cited in legal and academic circles as evidence of the systemic way Palestinians have been rhetorically and politically erased. Human rights observers have emphasized that even seemingly outlandish or absurd dehumanizations are dangerous, especially when voiced by national leaders. The absurdity of such language does not dilute its harm—it amplifies it by making it sound detached from accountability.

It is also worth noting the historical moment in which the comment was made. The Second Intifada was unfolding, and tensions were at a peak. Rather than using his platform to promote de-escalation or understanding, Katsav chose to contribute to a narrative of radical separation and moral exclusion.

Moshe Katsav's presidency ended in disgrace after he was convicted of sexual assault and rape—another instance of abusing power and violating human dignity. His rhetoric about Palestinians reflects a consistent pattern: the reduction of others to objects outside the realm of ethical consideration.

12. Conclusion

The use of dehumanizing language by state leaders is not a peripheral issue in international politics—it is often a central mechanism through which systemic violence is justified, normalized, and carried out. This paper has examined the public statements of ten prominent Israeli figures—spanning military, diplomatic, political, and religious leadership—who have described Palestinians or Hamas using explicitly dehumanizing terms. These include references to Palestinians as "subhuman," "human animals," "two-legged beasts," "cancer," "cannibals," and even beings from another galaxy.

Each of these cases illustrates not only a rhetorical offense but a deeper ideological pattern. The language is not random, nor merely emotional venting in moments of crisis. It reflects long-standing worldviews that treat Palestinians as

obstacles to be removed rather than people to be engaged. These statements are embedded in broader policies—sieges, blockades, population transfers, settlement expansions, and military campaigns—that routinely disregard international humanitarian law.

The consequences of such rhetoric are profound. Dehumanization lowers the moral threshold for violence. It erases civilian suffering by portraying entire populations as inherently violent, diseased, or alien. It fractures any remaining basis for dialogue or compromise. Most dangerously, it signals to both society and soldiers that brutality is not only permissible but necessary and righteous.

While defenders of the figures examined in this paper may argue that their remarks were taken out of context, misinterpreted, or directed solely at terrorists, the consistency of dehumanizing themes across decades and political factions suggests otherwise. These are not isolated incidents—they are indicators of a political culture in which denial of Palestinian humanity is institutionally tolerated, and at times, promoted.

The international community must take seriously the role of language in enabling violence. Legal frameworks such as the Genocide Convention and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court recognize incitement and hate speech as prosecutable acts—not only because of their moral harm, but because of their predictive power. Words precede actions. When leaders speak of people as animals or diseases, history has shown that atrocities often follow.

Finally, this paper does not claim that only Israeli leaders use dehumanizing rhetoric, nor that Palestinians are without their own forms of incitement. Rather, it focuses on those with overwhelming power—militarily, economically, and politically—whose words are backed by institutions capable of shaping reality on a massive scale. It is precisely because Israel is a functioning democracy with a global voice that such language must be confronted and rejected.

Until the humanity of all people in the region is acknowledged, peace will remain elusive. A just future cannot be built on metaphors of erasure.

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